

## LETTER WRITING

Writing letters has been an important part of life for most of us. It's the way we communicated with friends and family who were far away, expressed our love to a special one, or conducted business. Getting a hand written letter today is a rare phenomenon. Those letters have been replaced by faster emails and phone calls. Here is one woman's thoughts about the value of writing letters. ([Read "I Believe in Writing Letters."](#)) W.H. Auden described the mail being transported across England in his poem "Night Train." ([Read excerpt.](#))

- What does it feel like to get a letter today? ([Read Captain Kangaroo letter.](#))

As children, our first letters were often the **thank you notes** we sent after receiving birthday and Christmas gifts. ([Share a thank you note you've kept.](#))

- What was the ritual in your family for expressing thanks?
- What other types of letters did you send or receive? (Vacation postcards, chain letters, love letters, business letters, letters to college students or soldiers...) ([Read "1,716 Letters," an essay about letters exchanged by a wife and her soldier husband during WWII.](#))

There's a great place on the Internet that gathers and sorts fascinating letters, postcards, telegrams, faxes, and memos. It's called [Letters of Note](#) and includes missives from famous and interesting people of all kinds. Here are a few that I think you'll find intriguing. ([You may want to read these to the group and pass them around.](#))

- When Marilyn Monroe was in the hospital to have her appendix removed, she wrote this note to her surgeon. ([Read "No Ovaries Removed."](#))
- A Japanese Kamikaze pilot sent this letter to his two small children before leaving on his last mission. ([Read "Be An Unbeatable Person..."](#))
- A young Elizabeth Taylor sent this note to a fan. ([Read "Why Don't You Write a Story."](#))
- In 1869, in response to a sharp rise in the number of babies being abandoned in New York, often in dangerous circumstances, The Foundling Asylum – run by Sister Irene Fitzgibbon – opened to the public with a single white cradle on its doorstep. In the first two years alone, 2,500 children were taken in. Babies were often abandoned at the Foundling along with a letter. Here are a couple of them. ([Read "I Beg You to Take My Child" and show pictures of actual letters.](#))

One thing that these letters show is the beautiful **handwriting** that was common in the past. All of us were taught handwriting or cursive when we were in school but today, many schools do not teach it. As a result, many of today's children have terrible handwriting and have trouble reading handwritten letters!

A woman named Barbara wrote this essay about finding a **stash of letters** from her daughter after she died. ([Read "Letters Lost."](#))

- What letters have you kept over the years? Why were they important?
- ([Share letters that you've kept.](#))

Often our most important thoughts are those that we share in the form of a letter. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s *Letter from Birmingham Jail* in 1963 is one such epistle and arguably the most important written document of the civil rights era. It's a long letter, but here is an excerpt that starts out "Dear Fellow Clergymen." ([Read excerpt from letter, "Justice Denied."](#))

Some of the most important letters that we write are to our children and grandchildren. We can share our hopes and dreams for them, relate tales of their family history, and share our values.

## RESOURCES:

- Personal letters from your own collection.
- *Posterity* by Dorie McCullough Lawson; a collection of letters from famous people to their children.
- [Letters of Note](#); check their archives.
- Two essays from [This I Believe](#): "The Lost and Found Art of Letter Writing" and "The Written Word."
- Old stamps.
- Jackie Robinson wrote to President Eisenhower in 1958 and begged him not to ask African-Americans to show patience. "Have Patience"